

(19)



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Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 093 264 A2

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
18.04.2001 Bulletin 2001/16

(51) Int Cl.7: H04L 12/56, H04Q 11/04

(21) Application number: 00460043.3

(22) Date of filing: 11.07.2000

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 14.10.1999 US 417834
03.01.2000 US 476374

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(54) **Method and apparatus for providing cell payload integrity verification and detecting defective modules in telecommunication devices**

(57) A method for verifying the integrity of data payloads of ATM cells passing through a switching device involves computing a payload integrity verification code for the payload portion of an ATM cell and passing the payload integrity verification code along a data path in a telecommunications device with the ATM cell. The payload integrity verification code may be generated according to any error detection or error correction scheme including CRC, check sum, BIP or the like. In preferred embodiments of the invention, the payload integrity verification code is stored in a portion of the standard ATM cell header which is not used during the period while the cell is passing through the telecommunications device. Preferably the payload integrity verification code is stored in all, or a portion of, the virtual path identifier or virtual connection identifier fields within the standard ATM cell header. In most telecommunications devices the function of the VPI and VCI fields are replaced by a connection identifier field which is appended to the cell while the cell is passing through the telecommunications device. The invention allows for the immediate identification of cells having corrupted payload data. In preferred embodiments of the invention where the payload integrity verification code applies only to the payload data

and wherein there is separate check data applying to the ATM header fields, different actions can be taken on the detection of errors in the ATM cell header and ATM cell payloads respectively.

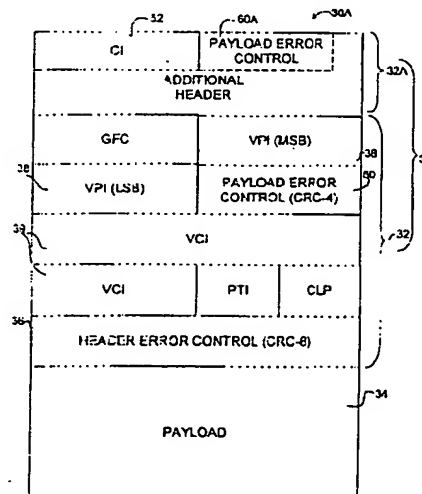


FIG. 6

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Description

Technical Field

[0001] This invention relates generally to telecommunication networks. Specific embodiments of the invention relate to asynchronous transfer mode (ATM) networks. The invention relates more specifically to the detection of errors in the data payloads of data packets being handled by telecommunication devices and to the identification of specific malfunctioning modules within such telecommunication devices which cause data packet payload corruption. The data packets may be, for example, ATM cells, IP packets, frame relay packets or the like.

Background

[0002] In a data telecommunication network, data is broken into data packets which are forwarded from sources to destinations. The data packets may all have the same fixed size as do ATM cells or may have variable lengths as do IP packets. Typically each cell includes a header which includes information about the data packet, including its destination and a data payload. According to the current ATM specification, each ATM cell is 53 bytes long and consists of a 48-byte payload and a 5-byte header.

[0003] The network comprises a number of data transmission links which are connected to one another at nodes. In traversing the network the data packets are passed along the transmission links from node to node. One or more telecommunication devices are located at each node. The telecommunication devices may have, between themselves, various functions including directing received packets to the appropriate outgoing transmission link.

[0004] For example, in an ATM network a number of virtual circuit connections (VCCs) are set up between pairs of end points on the network. Streams of ATM cells can be sent along each virtual circuit connection. In passing along a virtual circuit connection, each ATM cell typically passes through one or more ATM switches. The ATM switches direct the cells so that each cell will arrive at its intended end point. A challenge facing the designers of ATM networks is the very high speeds at which ATM cells must be passed through the network and switched by network switches. ATM cells can become corrupted as they pass through an ATM network for various reasons including hardware faults, hardware failures, and software errors which might, for example, cause certain components within an ATM switch to be improperly configured.

[0005] There are many systems for measuring the end-to-end performance of connections provided by an ATM network. Such systems typically measure the performance of end-to-end channels across an ATM network. While there are methods for determining the node

in an ATM network at which faults are occurring such methods do not facilitate the location of specific faulty cards or modules of telecommunication devices on the ATM network. In studying the source of errors in ATM networks it is often assumed that errors arise in the communication links connecting switches in the network and that network switches perfectly transmit all ATM cells which they receive. ATM networks typically include many telecommunication devices. Each such device typically includes modules which may occasionally, if rarely, fail in ways which result in corruption of some ATM cells. Some such failures may be intermittent in nature. It is therefore almost inevitable that a practical ATM network will occasionally encounter situations where ATM cells become corrupted as they traverse the ATM network. In most practical ATM networks the localization of intermittent errors to particular switches or to particular portions of switches can be very difficult with prior methods.

[0006] Most standards governing the manner in which ATM cells are passed over the physical links which connect telecommunication devices in ATM networks include error detection protocols. There are no such standards for detecting TM cells which become corrupted within telecommunication devices.

[0007] There is a need for an effective way to detect and localize errors which result in the corruption of data payloads in ATM cells. In particular, there is a need for effective methods and apparatus capable of identifying specific cards or modules within ATM telecommunication devices at which ATM cells are being corrupted. There is a particular need for such methods and apparatus which fully cover data paths within ATM telecommunication devices and do not merely cover specific interfaces between devices or functions internal to a telecommunication device, such as a switch. Such data paths may include several buffers, interfaces, connections etc. as they pass through a telecommunication device.

Summary of the Invention

[0008] This invention provides methods and apparatus for evaluating the performance of devices in telecommunication networks. Particular embodiments are directed to detecting the corruption of packets and identifying faulty telecommunication devices which cause corruption of packets. More specific embodiments are directed to identifying faulty modules within a telecommunication device.

[0009] One aspect of the invention provides a method for detecting corrupted packets in a telecommunication device. The method includes at an upstream location on the data path within the telecommunication device generating a first payload integrity verification code from the payload of a data packet; attaching the first payload integrity verification code to the data packet; at a downstream location on the data path within the telecommu-

nication device reading the payload of the data packet, reading the first payload integrity verification code from the data packet and checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code matches the payload of the data packet; and, if the first payload integrity verification code does not match the payload of the data packet, signalling an error. When the data path passes through several modules in the telecommunication device the locations at which corrupted packets are detected can be used to identify faulty modules in the telecommunication device.

[0010] Preferred embodiments comprise reading the first payload integrity verification code from the data packet and checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code matches the payload of the data packet at multiple downstream locations within the telecommunication device.

[0011] Another aspect of the invention provides a method for locating a faulty module in a packet handling device in a telecommunication network. The device has a data path for carrying data packets and the data path passes through a plurality of modules in the device. The method comprises: at a plurality of locations on the data path within the device reading an integrity verification code from the packet and determining if the integrity verification code matches the packet; and, if the integrity verification code at one of the locations does not match the packet, generating a signal indicating that the packet is corrupted.

[0012] In preferred embodiments, when the integrity verification code at one of the locations does not match the packet, the method further comprises determining a new integrity verification code which does match the packet and writing the new integrity verification code to the packet before passing the packet along the data path to a next one of the locations.

[0013] A further aspect of the invention provides a method for passing information from an upstream location in a cell stream in an ATM telecommunication device to a downstream location in the ATM telecommunication device. The method avoids increasing the amount of data to be sent through the telecommunication device by reusing at least a portion of one or more of the VPI and VCI fields of ATM cells. The method comprises: receiving at an ATM telecommunication device an ATM cell having VPI and VCI fields in an ATM cell header; at an upstream location within the ATM telecommunication device, adding a connection identifier to the ATM cell and recording information in at least a portion of the VPI and VCI fields of the ATM cell; passing the cell to a downstream location along a data path in the ATM telecommunication device; at the downstream location retrieving the recorded information; and, before the cell egresses from the ATM telecommunication device, if the information is recorded in any portion of the VPI field, writing a VPI value to the VPI field of the cell and, if the information is recorded in any portion of the VCI field, writing a VCI value to the VCI field of the cell

and removing the connection identifier. The telecommunication device may be an ATM switch for example.

[0014] Yet another aspect of the invention provides a telecommunication device for handling data packets in a telecommunication network. The telecommunication device comprises: an ingress, an egress, and a data path extending between the ingress and the egress; a payload integrity verification code calculator at a first location on the data path; an payload integrity verification code writing circuit connected to write a first payload integrity verification code to a data packet at the first location; and, a payload integrity verification circuit at a second location on the data path downstream from the first location. In a preferred embodiment the payload integrity verification circuit comprises: a second payload integrity verification code generator located on the data path downstream from the first location; a comparing circuit connected to compare the first payload integrity verification code generated by the first payload integrity verification code calculator to a second payload integrity verification code detection generated by the second payload integrity verification code calculator; and, a signalling circuit to generate an error signal whenever the first payload integrity verification code is different from the second payload integrity verification code.

[0015] This invention may be applied to verify the integrity of the data payloads of ATM cells within ATM telecommunication devices, such as ATM switches. The methods of the invention involve generating a payload integrity verification code for ATM cells entering a telecommunication device. The payload integrity verification code is attached to the cell. At one or more downstream locations within the telecommunications device the payload integrity verification code is checked to determine whether it matches the cell data payload. This may be done by recalculating the payload integrity verification code and comparing it to the originally calculated payload integrity verification code. Preferably the payload integrity verification code is checked at multiple downstream locations to permit the identification of defective modules within the telecommunication device.

[0016] In some embodiments of the invention the payload integrity verification code is written to the VPI/VCI fields of the cell (i.e. one or more of the 5th through 28th bits of the 5 byte ATM cell header). While an ATM cell is in transit through a telecommunication device the VPI field, the VCI field, or both the VPI AND VCI fields are often irrelevant. Therefore one can surprisingly provide cell payload integrity verification by including a payload integrity verification code in VPI field and/or the VCI field without adversely affecting throughput of the telecommunication device. The payload integrity verification code may be a checksum, a CRC-8 value, a CRC-4 value, a parity bit, a BIP code or another suitable error correction or error detection code. In other embodiments of the invention the payload integrity verification code is included in an additional header or trailer attached to an ATM cell.

[0017] The invention also provides a signal propagating in an ATM switch. The signal comprises an ATM cell payload, an ATM cell header, and a payload integrity verification code for the ATM cell payload. The payload integrity verification code is stored in VCI and/or VPI fields of the ATM header. Such a signal may be used to check the integrity of the payload at downstream locations.

[0018] Further aspects and advantages of the invention are described below.

Brief Description of Drawings

[0019] In drawings which illustrate non-limiting embodiments of the invention:

Figure 1 is a schematic illustration of a simple prior art ATM network;

Figure 2A is a diagram illustrating a structure of a User-Network Interface ATM cell;

Figure 2B is a diagram illustrating a structure of a Network-Network Interface ATM cell;

Figure 3 is a schematic view illustrating a possible virtual circuit connection provided by the network of Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a block diagram of some main functional components of one type of ATM switch;

Figure 5 is a block diagram illustrating selected functional components of an ingress card in an ATM switch according to the invention;

Figure 6 is a signal according to the invention being propagated through an ATM switch.

Figure 7 is a block diagram illustrating selected functional components of an egress card in an ATM switch according to the invention;

Figure 8 illustrates a telecommunication device according to one embodiment of the invention which comprises a number of replaceable modules;

Figure 9A is a flowchart illustrating a method according to the invention; and,

Figure 9B is a flowchart illustrating a method according to a specific embodiment of the invention.

Description

[0020] This invention is described below in the context of an ATM network comprising a number of ATM switches. As described below, certain embodiments of the invention have application in telecommunication networks and devices generally. Other embodiments of the invention have application in ATM networks which differ from the example ATM network described below.

[0021] Figure 1 illustrates a simple ATM network 10. Network 10 permits data to be interchanged between a number of network edge devices 12. Each network edge device 12 provides at least one end point. The simple network of Figure 1 permits data to be interchanged between 7 end points 14A through 14G.

[0022] Network 10 comprises 5 ATM switches 20 linked by communication links 22. Communication links 22 typically comprise fiber-optic cables but may also comprise wired or wireless connections. Communication links 22 may carry ATM cells by any of a variety of physical layer protocols.

[0023] Figure 2A shows the structure of an ATM cell 30 according to the current ATM standard. The cell 30 of Figure 2A is a User Network Interface ("UNI") cell. UNI cells are used in the interface between an ATM end-point and an ATM switch. Cell 30 comprises a 5-byte header 32 and a 48-byte payload 34. Cell 30 has a total of 53 bytes. Header 32 has a number of fields including a virtual path identifier ("VPI") field 38, a virtual channel identifier ("VCI") field 39 and a header error control byte 36. In UNI ATM cells, a portion 38A of VPI field 35 is allocated as a generic flow control field ("GFC"). In this specification the term "VPI field" includes any portion of the VPI field which may be allocated to GFC. In a standard ATM cell the VPI field is allocated 12 bits (including any bits allocated for GFC). In the interfaces between switches 20, ATM cells have no GFC field. Such cells are called Network Network Interface ("NNI") cells. An NNI ATM cell 30 according to the current ATM standard is shown in Figure 2B.

[0024] Any link 22 in network 10 will typically be carrying ATM cells 30 for a number of different VCCs at any given time. As the destination of each cell is specified by the combination of the cells virtual path and virtual channel (VPI/VCI) it is necessary to operate network 10 in such a manner that there is never a case where cells belonging to different VCCs traversing a single link 22 have the same VPI/VCI value. Because VCCs are being set up and taken down on a continuous basis it is generally impractical to assign VPI/VCI values to each VCC in a manner which ensures that the above-noted situation will never arise. Consequently, ATM networks assign values of VPI and VCI for each link 22.

[0025] Figure 3 shows an example of a possible VCC connecting end points 14A and 14F. Cells in the VCC are delivered to switch 20A and then travel to switch 20C via link 22C. The cells then travel through switch 20E on link 22F. Finally the cells are delivered by switch 20E to end point 14F. In the given example, cells are assigned the VPI/VCI 5/17 for the time they are traversing link 22C and are assigned the VPI/VCI 3/22 for the time they are traversing link 22F. These values are chosen at the time the VCC is set up so as not to conflict with the VPI/VCI values for any other VCC traversing links 22C or 22F respectively.

[0026] At switch 20A, each packet in the VCC is assigned the VPI/VCI 5/17. These values are written to the VPI and VCI fields in the cell header 32 for each cell travelling in the VCC. In switch 20C the VPI/VCI pair 5/17 is read and switch 20C determines that the appropriate VPI/VCI for link 22F is 3/22. Switch 20C therefore writes VPI equal to 3 in the VPI field 38 of cell 30, writes VCI equal to 22 in the VCI field 39 of cell 30 and forwards

cell 30 out the port connected to link 22F for delivery to switch 20E.

[0027] Cells 30 may become unintentionally corrupted as they transit between endpoints 14A and 14F due to malfunctioning components. Switches 20A, 20C and 20E operate at very high speeds. It is possible that the header or payload of any cell 30 may become corrupted in passing through a switch. A cell may become corrupted due to faulty hardware, transient events such as the interaction of gamma rays with memory devices inside a switch, power fluctuations or the like. It can be difficult to determine where corrupted cells are being corrupted. Cells 30 could be corrupted as they pass through one of communication links 22C or 22F, or one of switches 20A, 20C or 20E, or one of network edge devices 12, or in the communication links 22 connecting edge devices 12 with switches 20A and 20E respectively.

[0028] Figure 4 illustrates a typical ATM switch 20. Switch 20 has a number of ingress ports I and a number of egress ports E. Cells are received at ingress ports I which are typically located on ingress cards 40. Cells from several ingress cards 40 may be passed to a multiplexer 42 and to a hub 44. Hub 44 passes the cells into a switching matrix 46. Switching matrix 46 selectively directs the cells to one of several hubs 48. From hubs 48 the cells are directed to egress cards 50 which are each connected at one of egress ports E to an outgoing link 22. As is known to those skilled in the art there are many possible designs for ATM switches. By way of example only, some ATM switches do not have multiplexers 42, some ATM switches do not have hubs 44, in some ATM switches functions are divided between different cards in a different manner from that illustrated in Figure 4.

[0029] Typically, at ingress cards 40 the VPI/VCI information for each cell is read and converted to a connection identifier which is used internally in switch 20. The connection identifier identifies the egress port to which the cell should be directed and also specifies the VCC to which the cell in question belongs. At egress ports 50 the connection identifier is used to determine the VPI/VCI to be used for the cell on the next communication link 22. The connection identifier is typically included as part of an additional proprietary header which is added to the cell at an ingress card 40. In order to maximize throughput of switch 20 and to keep switch 20 simple, it is generally desirable to keep the size of the proprietary header to a minimum.

[0030] While it is not illustrated here, an ATM switch such as the one shown in Figure 4 typically includes parallel redundant fabric such that if there is a failure in one part of this fabric the switch can continue to operate. Furthermore, the switch typically includes a number of independently replaceable modules, such as separate circuit boards, which can be individually removed and replaced to correct any problems which may develop. Data corruption may occur on any module within switch 20 which may malfunction.

[0031] This invention detects corruption of payloads 34 which occur inside an ATM telecommunication device, such as a switch, by computing a payload integrity verification code for the payload of each cell. The payload integrity verification code is preferably computed and attached to cells 30 at a point which is as close as practical to the ingress where cells 30 enter the telecommunication device.

[0032] Figure 5 shows an example of an ingress card 40 which includes apparatus for practising the invention. For clarity, ingress card functional elements which are not directly related to the practice of this invention are not shown in Figure 5. Ingress card 40 includes a payload integrity verification code computation circuit 54 which computes a payload integrity verification code for each cell 30 received at ingress I₁. Depending upon the number of bits available for carrying the payload integrity verification code the payload integrity verification code may be for example a CRC-8 value, a CRC-4 value, a parity bit or another suitable error detection code. The payload integrity verification code is associated with a cell 30 by cell modifier 58 and is forwarded with cell 30 through the switch 20. Cells modified by cell modifier 58 are labelled 30A. Depending upon what algorithm is used to generate the payload integrity verification code, some errors may go undetected. For example, a cell might become corrupted in such a way that the CRC-4 value for the calculated for the corrupted cell is the same as the CRC-4 value calculated for the cell before it was corrupted. A CRC-8 value will provide better coverage than a CRC-4 value which will, in turn, provide better coverage than a parity bit.

[0033] In a preferred embodiment of this invention, ingress card 40 includes a VPI/VCI decoder 55 which reads the VPI/VCI value for each cell and identifies a cell stream to which each cell belongs. VPI/VCI decoder 55 identifies a connection identifier ("CI") for the cell. The connection identifier is typically included in an additional header which is generated by a header generator 56. The additional header 32A generated by header generator 56, is added to the cell 30 at cell modifier 58. While it is not conventional to do so, the CI could also be included in a trailer added to each ATM cell. Methods and apparatus suitable for identifying cell streams and generating additional cell headers or trailers are well understood to those skilled in the art and will therefore not be described herein.

[0034] The payload integrity verification code generated by payload error calculator 54 is written into cell 30. In some embodiments of the invention the payload integrity verification code is written to all, or a portion of, the VPI/VCI fields 38, 39 for the cell. As noted above, the VPI and/or VCI fields are not required within switch 20 because the destination of the cell is specified by connection identifier 62. On egress from switch 20 the VPI and/or VCI values for any cell will be set to new, probably different, values which will apply for the next hop to be taken by the cell 30 on the next link 22. By

reusing one or both of the VPI/VCI fields, or portions of one or both of those fields, for payload integrity verification code information while the cell is passing through a switch 20, one arrives at the useful and surprising result that one can add a payload integrity verification code to cells 30 passing through switches 20 to enable the detection of payload corruption within the switch 20 without increasing the size of the cells 30A traversing the switch 20.

[0035] In some types of ATM switching the VCI field is not rewritten at the egress of the switch but the VPI field is rewritten. In such cases the payload integrity verification code information may be included in all, or a portion of the VPI field of ATM cells.

[0036] If the payload integrity verification code is written into the VPI and/or VCI fields of cells then preferably a flag in an additional header or trailer of the cell is set to indicate that the VPI and/or VCI fields contain the payload integrity verification code. In some cases the methods of the invention will not be applied to all cell streams in a telecommunication device. In such cases the flag is needed so that downstream error checkers do not attempt to interpret as payload integrity verification codes VPI and/or VCI values in those cells belonging to streams which do not have payload integrity verification codes written to their VPI/VCI fields.

[0037] The payload integrity verification code computed by payload error calculator 54 may also be included as part of the proprietary header (or trailer) which is added to the cell 30 by cell modifier 58. For example, Figure 6 shows an ATM cell having a payload integrity verification code 60A in additional header 32A. This embodiment of the invention has the advantage that it permits a payload integrity verification code to be attached to a cell 30 even before the cell is processed by VPI/VCI decoder 55. As noted above it is desirable to attach the payload integrity verification code to a cell at a location which is close to the point at which the cell enters a switch or other telecommunication device. This embodiment may not be ideal in some cases because adding cell payload integrity verification codes to the additional header increases the minimum size of the additional header. This will negatively impact the throughput of switch 20 unless the data paths within switch 20 have been designed to have capacity sufficient to handle ATM cells having additional headers large enough to contain the payload integrity verification codes at the switch's maximum designed-for throughput. Providing such capacity can increase the complexity and cost of a switch or other telecommunication device.

[0038] Figure 6 shows an example of the format of a signal 30A representing a cell 30 traversing a switch 20. Signal 30A may be, at various times, embodied as a data structure within a memory in switch 20, as electrical signals on a bus within switch 20, or as optical signals on an optical bus within switch 20.

[0039] Signal 30A has a payload 34, and a header 33. Header 33 has a header 32, as described above, with

the exception that a payload integrity verification code 60 is included in all, or part of VPI/VCI fields 36, 37. In the example of Figure 6, the payload error correction code occupies the highest order 4 bits of the VCI field. Header 33 also comprises an additional header 32A which includes at least a connection identifier field 62. Preferably, header error control field 36 comprises a CRC-8 checksum, or other header error control value which is computed for all of header 33, and not merely header 32. It is important to detect errors in header 33 because an error in header 33 could result in a cell being delivered to an unintended destination. If a cell 30 has an error in header 33 then the cell 30 is preferably discarded.

[0040] As shown in Figure 7, egress card 50 includes a payload integrity verification circuit. In the embodiment of Figure 7 the payload integrity verification circuit comprises a second payload integrity verification code calculator 54 and a comparison circuit 66. Second payload integrity verification code calculator 54 computes, again, the error code for the payload 34 of a cell 30A arriving at egress board 50 and then comparison circuit 66 compares the result of that calculation with the payload integrity verification code 60 written in cell 30A. If the results match then it is assumed that the payload of the cell has not been corrupted during passage through the switch and the cell is then passed out of egress board 50 to egress E₁ by way of a converter 58. Converter 58 strips off additional header 32A and writes appropriate VPI/VCI values to fields 38 and 39 for the next link in the cell's VCC.

[0041] If the second payload integrity verification code generated by second payload integrity verification code calculator 54 does not match the payload integrity verification code 60 stored in the header of the cell then it is known that the payload of the cell must have been corrupted somewhere within switch 20 or that the payload integrity verification code 60 must have itself become corrupted. In the case of a mismatch an error is signalled. In the example of Figure 7, an error is signalled by writing the connection identifier for the cell in question to a first in first out (FIFO) memory 67. Other action could be taken, for example, any cell with a corrupted payload could be dropped or an error signal could be delivered on an error signal line 68.

[0042] The payload integrity verification circuit may comprise, in the alternative, a calculator which computes a result as a function of a payload integrity verification code and a cell payload. The result has a first value if the payload integrity verification code matches the cell payload. The result has a value other than the first value if the payload integrity verification code does not match the cell payload. The result may be inspected to determine whether or not it has the first value. If the result does not have the first value then an alarm signal may be generated. The particular function used to compute the result will depend upon the function used to compute the payload integrity verification code. For ex-

ample, if the payload integrity verification code is a parity bit then the result may be computed by computing the parity of the cell payload taken together with the payload integrity verification code.

[0043] In order to detect as many instances as possible of payload corruptions which occur inside a switch 20, it is desirable that the payload integrity verification code 60 for each cell be calculated as close as possible to the ingress at which the cell enters switch 20. The second calculation of the payload integrity verification code 60 should occur as closely as possible to the egress at which the cell leaves the switch 20.

[0044] To locate more precisely where inside a switch the payload of a cell has become corrupted it is desirable to provide one or more additional payload integrity verification circuits (in the illustrated embodiment code calculators 54 and comparers 66) at various points within switch 20. An error code calculator may be provided at the egress and ingress of each card, or other replaceable module, in a data path in an ATM switch or other telecommunications device. This enables the reasonably rapid identification of a specific card or module on which data corruption errors are occurring. This in turn enables a technician to replace the card or module to restore normal service. Each payload integrity verification code calculator and 54 and comparer 66 function as described above to determine whether the cell's payload may be corrupted. If a mismatch is detected then the circuitry can signal an error condition as described above.

[0045] Where a cell may pass through two or more payload integrity verification circuits on its way through a switch 20 it is generally desirable that the first payload integrity verification circuit encountered by the cell somehow alters the cell if an error is detected. The alteration to the cell indicates to any downstream payload integrity verification detection circuits that an error in the cell has already been detected. This may be done in a number of ways. For example, at each payload integrity verification circuit which detects an error, the payload error integrity verification code (and, if necessary the header error control code 36) can be recalculated for cells identified as having corrupted payloads. The recalculated value(s) can be written to appropriate locations in the cell. Unless the cell becomes further corrupted as it passes downstream through the telecommunication device, downstream payload integrity verification circuits will read the recalculated payload error integrity verification code and will not detect that the cell has been corrupted.

[0046] In the alternative, a particular payload integrity verification code 60 may be reserved for use with cells having previously detected errors. Downstream payload integrity verification circuits may be configured to ignore cells having the reserved error detection. This has the disadvantage that a certain number of payload errors may pass undetected, but has the advantage that it does not require any extra space to be reserved in cell 30 for

a flag, or the like, which could further reduce the throughput of switch 20.

[0047] Figure 8 shows a packet handling device 70 which includes several modules 71A, 71B, 71C, and 71D (which will be referred to collectively as modules 71) on a data path 72 which connects an ingress I to an egress E. Packet handling device 70 may be any of various kinds of devices which handle data packets in a telecommunication network. Packet handling device 70 may include other modules, other ingresses, and other egresses none of which are shown for clarity. The data packets may be of any of various types and may have fixed or variable lengths. A problem is to determine when device 70 is faulty. A more specific problem is to locate a specific one of modules 71 which is faulty.

[0048] Device 70 includes an integrity verification code generator 73 which generates integrity verification codes for packets entering device 70 at ingress I. Integrity verification code generator 73 is preferably on an ingress module 71A at a location on data path 72 which is as close as practical to ingress I. Integrity verification code generator 73 computes an integrity verification code by applying a suitable algorithm to each packet passing along data path 72. For example, integrity code generator 73 may generate a CRC-8 value, a CRC-4 value or a parity bit from all of, or a portion of, each packet. Integrity code generator 73 writes to integrity verification code to an unused field within the packet or to a header or trailer attached to the packet.

[0049] A plurality of integrity checking circuits 74A, 74B, 74C, 74D, 74E, 74F and 74G (collectively integrity checking circuits 74) are located on data path 72 at locations downstream from integrity code generator 73. Each integrity checking circuit 74 determines whether the integrity verification code in each packet matches the packet. This may be achieved, for example, as described above. If an integrity checking circuit 74 determines that the integrity verification code of the packet does not match the packet then an error is signalled. Signalling the error may include capturing a connection identifier, or other identifying information identifying the packet or a data stream to which the packet belongs, and writing the identifying information to a memory 75. Preferably, when an integrity checking circuit 74 determines that the integrity verification code of the packet does not match the packet then the integrity checking circuit computes a new integrity verification code which does match the packet and writes that new integrity verification code to the packet.

[0050] If device 70 is faulty and is causing packets to become corrupted then one or more of integrity checking circuits 74 will generate a series of error signals. The particular module 71 which is faulty can be determined by ascertaining which one of integrity checking circuits 74 is generating the error signals. This can be determined, for example, by inspecting the contents of memories 75. Locating an integrity checking circuit 74 at the ingress and egress of a module allows the module to be

identified as being faulty.

[0051] Figure 9A shows a method 100 according to a simple embodiment of the invention. Method 100 begins by receiving a cell 30 at a telecommunication device, such as a switch 20 (Step 102). In Step 104 a first payload integrity verification code 60 is calculated. In Step 106 the payload integrity verification code 60 is added to the cell 30. At a second point, while cell 30 is still within the switch 20, a second payload integrity verification code is generated (Step 108). The first and second payload integrity verification codes are then compared in Step 112. If the first and second payload integrity verification codes are the same then no problems have been detected with the payload of the cell and the cell is sent onwardly. If the first and second payload integrity verification code 60 are not the same then an error is signalled (Step 114). Signalling the error may consist of, include or be followed by capturing the CI from the cell in question (step 114A). Optionally the cell may be dropped (Step 116) or other corrective action may be taken.

[0052] Where there is a cell payload integrity verifier which is upstream from another cell payload integrity verifier (i.e. where there are two or more downstream payload integrity verifiers) it may be desirable for the upstream payload integrity verifiers to alter the payload data so that additional error signals are not generated by all of the downstream checkers. This may be done, for example, by re-calculating the payload integrity verification code for each cell in which an error is detected at the upstream payload integrity verifier, writing the re-calculated value of the payload integrity verification code to the cell, and then forwarding the cell along the data path. Unless the payload data becomes further corrupted, subsequent payload integrity verifiers will not detect an error in respect of that cell.

[0053] Figure 9B shows a method 120 according to a more specific embodiment of the invention. Method 120 begins by receiving a cell 30 at a switch 20 (Step 122). The virtual path identifier of the cell is read and a connection identifier is generated for the cell (Step 124). The connection identifier is added to the cell (Step 126). Step 126 may involve, for example, adding an additional header 32A to the cell. In Step 128 a payload integrity verification code is generated. Step 128 may be performed in parallel with, before, or after Steps 124 and 126. Payload integrity verification code 60 is then written to all, or a portion of the VPI/VCI fields in the header 32 of the cell 30 (step 130). Subsequently, a header check sum is computed for the header 33 of the cell in Step 132. Step 132 may be performed at any time after the content of the various fields in the header 33 of the cell are known. It is not necessary for step 132 to be delayed until after Step 130. Preferably the header checksum is calculated from both header 32 (as modified by the replacement of part or all of the VPI/VCI fields with payload integrity verification code 60) and any additional headers 32A. In Step 134 the header check sum is written to

the header error control field. The cell 30 passes through switch 20 along a data path determined primarily by the connection identifier (Step 140).

[0054] Before cell 30 leaves switch 20 the payload integrity verification code for the cell payload 34 is computed again (Step 142) to yield a second payload integrity verification code 60. The first and second payload integrity verification codes 60 are then compared (Step 144). If the result of the comparison is that the first and second payload integrity verification codes are the same then the packet continues to the egress of switch 20. If the result of the comparison is that the first and second payload integrity verification code 60 are not the same then an error is signalled (step 146). Signalling the error may consist of, include or be followed by capturing the CI from the cell in question (step 146A). Optionally, corrective action, such as dropping the cell, is taken (Step 148). If the cell is not dropped then the corrupted cell may be allowed to proceed to the egress of the switch 20.

[0055] At the egress of switch 20, a VPI/VCI for the next link 22 is obtained (Step 150). The VPI/VCI is written to the VPI field in header 32 and the additional header is stripped from the cell. The header check sum is re-calculated and written to the header error control field (step 152). This cell is then forwarded to the next switch (or to a network edge device 12) on the next communication link 22 (step 154).

[0056] Only hardware which is explicitly involved in the practice of this invention is shown in the drawings and described above. Other hardware which is implicitly involved in the practice of the invention or not involved is not illustrated for clarity. Such hardware is well understood to those skilled in the art of designing telecommunication devices and networks. Because modern telecommunication devices such as ATM switches typically operate at high data rates, it is often not practical to process packets, or cells, under software control. Instead, the logic for processing packets or cells in high-speed telecommunication devices is typically provided either in application specific integrated circuits (ASICs) or in field programmable gate arrays (FPGAs). Apparatus for practising this invention may be incorporated in such ASICs or FPGAs. Steps in the methods of the invention may be performed in such ASICs or FPGAs. It can be appreciated that one advantage of this invention is that it can be practised without the need to add or replace the hardware used in many telecommunications devices. Such devices are often sufficiently flexible in design that they may be configured to practice this invention without significant hardware modifications.

[0057] As will be apparent to those skilled in the art in the light of the foregoing disclosure, many alterations and modifications are possible in the practice of this invention without departing from the spirit or scope thereof. For example, while the foregoing text uses the term "header" to describe how additional information is associated with a cell, it is not necessary that the additional

"header" be in any specific location relative to other data for a cell. In this application the term "header" includes a trailer which could be used to carry additional information associated with a cell in a telecommunication device.

[0058] While the invention has been described above primarily in the context of an ATM telecommunication network, embodiments of the invention may relate to non-ATM telecommunication networks. Accordingly, the scope of the invention is to be construed in accordance with the substance defined by the following claims.

Claims

1. A method for verifying the integrity of a payload in a data packet (30) within a telecommunication device (70) the device having a data path (72) for carrying data packets, the method comprising:
 - () at an upstream location on the data path (72) within the telecommunication device (70) generating (104, 128) a first payload integrity verification code (60) from the payload (34) of a data packet (30);
 - () attaching (130) the first payload integrity verification code (60) to the data packet (30);
 - () at a downstream location on the data path within the telecommunication device (70) reading the payload of the data packet, reading the first payload integrity verification code from the data packet and checking (112,144) to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the data packet (30); and,
 - (d) if the first payload integrity verification code (60) does not match the payload (34) of the data packet (30), signalling (114,146) an error condition.
2. The method of claim 2 wherein the data packets comprise ATM cells (30) and the device (70) comprises an ATM telecommunication device.
3. The method of claim 2 wherein checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the ATM cell (30) comprises generating a second payload integrity verification code from the cell payload (34) and, comparing the second payload integrity verification code to the first payload integrity verification code (60) attached to the cell (30).
4. The method of claim 3 wherein the first payload integrity verification code (60) is generated at an ingress (I) to the telecommunication device and the second payload integrity verification code is generated at an egress (E) from the telecommunication device.
5. The method of claim 2 or 3 comprising generating a third payload integrity verification code from the cell payload while the cell (30) is within the telecommunication device between the upstream and downstream locations; comparing the third payload integrity verification code to the first payload integrity verification code; and, if the first payload integrity verification code is not identical to the third payload integrity verification code signalling an error condition.
6. The method of claim 5 further comprising writing the third payload integrity verification code to the cell (30) in place of the first payload integrity verification code (60) whenever the first payload integrity verification code (60) is not identical to the third payload integrity verification code.
7. The method of claim 5 wherein, if the results of the comparison between the first and third payload integrity verification codes (60) is that the first and third payload integrity verification codes (60) are not identical, writing a value to the cell in place of the first payload integrity verification code (60), the value to indicating that an error has been detected in the cell payload (34).
8. The method of claim 2 wherein checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the ATM cell (30) comprises obtaining a result by computing a function of the cell payload (34) and the first payload integrity verification code (60) and comparing the result to a correct value.
9. The method of claim any one of claims 1 to 8 wherein attaching the first payload integrity verification code (60) to the cell (30) comprises storing the payload integrity verification code (60) in part or all of the VPI/VCI field (38,39) for the cell (30).
10. The method of claim 9 comprising attaching to each cell (30) an additional header (32A) comprising a connection information field (CI) derived from values of VPI and VCI fields (38,39) of the cell (30).
11. The method of any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein attaching the first payload integrity verification code (60) to the cell (30) comprises including the first payload integrity verification code (30) in an additional header (32A) attached to the cell.
12. The method of any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein attaching the first payload integrity verification code (60) to the cell (30) comprises including the first payload integrity verification code (60) in a trailer at-

tached to the cell (30).

13. The method of any one of claims 1 to 12 wherein the first payload integrity verification code (60) is a CRC-4 code.
14. The method of any one of claims 1 to 12 wherein the payload integrity verification code (60) is a CRC-8 code.
15. The method of any one of claims 1 to 12 wherein the payload integrity verification code (60) is a parity bit.
16. The method of claim 2 comprising checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the ATM cell (30) at a plurality of locations downstream from the upstream location within the ATM telecommunication device (70).
17. The method of claim 16 wherein the ATM telecommunication device (70) comprises a plurality of replaceable modules (71A, 71B, 71C, 71D) and wherein the method comprises checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the ATM cell (30) at each of an ingress (I) and egress (E) of each of a plurality of the replaceable modules (71A, 71B, 71C, 71D).
18. The method of claim 1 wherein the telecommunication device (70) comprises a plurality of replaceable modules (71A, 71B, 71C, 71D) and the method comprises identifying a malfunctioning one of the modules by reading the first payload integrity verification code (60) from the data packets (30) and checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the data packet (30) at multiple downstream locations within the telecommunication device.
19. The method of claim 18 comprising reading the first payload integrity verification code (60) from the data packet (30) and checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the data packet (30) at each of first and second locations within a module which is on the data path (72) downstream from the upstream location.
20. The method of claim 19 wherein the first and second locations within the module are respectively upstream and downstream from a packet processing element within the module.
21. The method of any one of claims 18 to 20 wherein the upstream location is within an upstream module

on the data path.

22. The method of any one of claims 18 to 20 wherein the data packet comprises an ATM cell (30).
23. The method of any one of claims 17 to 22 wherein checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload of the data packet (30) comprises generating a second payload integrity verification code from the cell payload (34) and, comparing the second payload integrity verification code to the first payload integrity verification code (60) attached to the data packet (30).
24. The method of claim 23 wherein the first payload integrity verification code (60) is generated at an ingress (I) to the telecommunication device (70) and the second payload integrity verification code is generated at an egress (E) from the telecommunication device (70).
25. The method of any one of claims 17 to 23 wherein the upstream location is at an ingress (I) to the telecommunication device and the downstream location is at an egress (E) from the telecommunication device.
26. The method of claim 18 wherein, at each of the multiple downstream locations, checking to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code (60) matches the payload (34) of the data packet (30) comprises generating (108, 142) a second payload integrity verification code from the cell payload (34) and, comparing (112, 144) the second payload integrity verification code to the payload integrity verification code (60) attached to the data packet.
27. The method of claim 26 comprising writing the second payload integrity verification code to the data packet whenever the payload integrity verification code (60) attached to the data packet is not identical to the second payload integrity verification code generated at the downstream location.
28. The method of claim 26 comprising, if the first and second payload integrity verification codes are not identical, writing a value to the data packet, the value indicating that an error has been detected in the data packet payload (34).
29. The method of claim 17 wherein checking (112, 144) to determine whether the first payload integrity verification code matches the payload (34) of the data packet (30) comprises obtaining a result by computing a function of the data packet payload (34) and the first payload integrity verification code (60) and comparing the result to a correct value.

30. A method for locating a faulty module (71A, 71B, 71C, 71D) in a packet handling device (70) in a telecommunication network, the device (70) having a data path (72) for carrying data packets (30), the data path (72) passing through a plurality of modules (71A, 71B, 71C, 71D) in the device (70), the method comprising:
- a) at a plurality of locations on the data path (72) within the device (70) reading an integrity verification code (60) from the packet and determining if the integrity verification code matches the packet (30); and,
 - b) if the integrity verification code (60) read at one of the locations does not match the packet (30), generating a signal indicating that the packet is corrupted.
31. The method of claim 30 wherein, if the integrity verification code (60) at one of the locations does not match the packet (30), the method further comprises determining a new integrity verification code which does match the packet (30) and writing the new integrity verification code to the packet (30) before passing the packet along the data path (72) to a next one of the locations.
32. The method of claim 30 wherein the plurality of locations include a location at an input of one of the plurality of modules and a location at an output of the one of the plurality of modules.
33. The method of claim 30 wherein the plurality of locations include a location at an input of each of two or more of the plurality of modules and a location at an output of each of the two or more modules.
34. The method of claim 33 comprising generating (104, 128) the integrity verification code at an upstream location within the device.
35. The method of claim 34 wherein the upstream location is at an input of an upstream one of the modules in the device.
36. The method of claim 35 wherein the upstream location is at an ingress (I) of the device (70).
37. The method of claim 30 wherein the plurality of locations include a location on the data path (72) upstream from a functional element in one of the plurality of modules and a location downstream from the functional element in the one of the modules.
38. A method for passing information from an upstream location in a cell stream in an ATM telecommunication device (70) to a downstream location in the ATM telecommunication device, the method comprising:
- a) receiving at an ATM telecommunication device an ATM cell (30) having VPI and VCI fields (38, 39) in an ATM cell header (32);
 - b) at an upstream location within the ATM telecommunication device, adding a connection identifier (CI) to the ATM cell and recording information in at least a portion of the VPI and VCI fields (38,39) of the ATM cell (30);
 - c) passing the cell (30) to a downstream location along a data path (72) in the ATM telecommunication device (70);
 - d) at the downstream location retrieving the recorded information; and,
 - e) before the cell egresses from the ATM telecommunication device, if the information is recorded in any portion of the VPI field, writing a VPI value to the VPI field (38) of the cell and, if the information is recorded in any portion of the VCI field, writing a VCI value to the VCI field (39) of the cell and removing the connection identifier (CI).
39. The method of claim 38 comprising adding to the ATM cell (30) at the upstream location a flag indicating that the VPI and VCI fields (38, 39) of the ATM cell contain information other than VPI and VCI values.
40. The method of claim 39 wherein the information comprises a payload integrity verification code (60) calculated for a payload (34) of the ATM cell (30).
41. A telecommunication device (70) for handling data packets in a telecommunication network, the telecommunication device comprising:
- (a) an ingress (I), an egress (E), and a data path (72) extending between the ingress (I) and the egress (E);
 - (b) a payload integrity verification code calculator (73) at a first location on the data path (72);
 - (c) an payload integrity verification code writing circuit (73) connected to write a first payload integrity verification code (60) to a data packet (30) at the first location; and,
 - (d) a payload integrity verification circuit (74) at a second location on the data path (72) downstream from the first location.
42. The telecommunication device of claim 41 wherein the payload integrity verification circuit comprises:
- (a) a second payload integrity verification code generator (54) located on the data path downstream from the first location; and,
 - (b) a comparing circuit (66) connected to compare the first payload integrity verification code (60) generated by the first payload integrity ver-

ification code calculator (54) to a second payload integrity verification code generated by the second payload integrity verification code calculator (54); and,

(c) a signalling circuit to generate an error signal whenever the first payload integrity verification code (60) is different from the second payload integrity verification code. 5

43. The telecommunication device of claim 42 wherein the payload integrity verification circuit (54) comprises: a calculator adapted to compute a result from the first payload integrity verification code and a cell payload, the result having a first value if the first payload integrity verification code matches the cell payload and the result having a value other than the first value if the first payload integrity verification code does not match the cell payload. 10 15

44. The device of any one of claims 41 to 43 wherein the device comprises an ATM switch and the data path extends through a switching matrix. 20

45. A signal propagating in an ATM switch, the signal comprising an ATM cell payload (34), an ATM cell header (32), and a payload integrity verification code (60) for the ATM cell payload, the payload integrity verification code stored in VCI and/or VPI fields (38, 39) of the ATM header (32). 25 30

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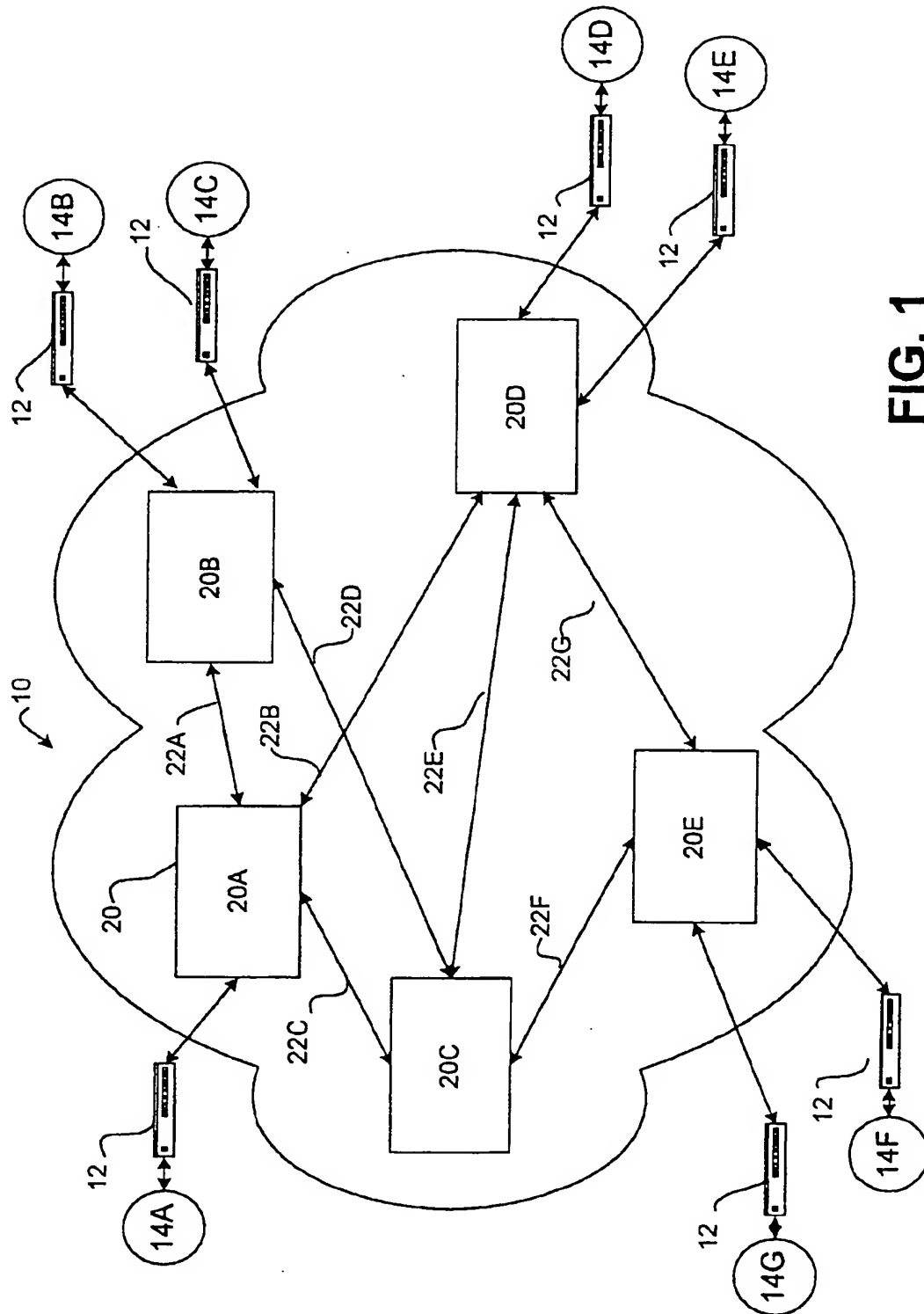


FIG. 1

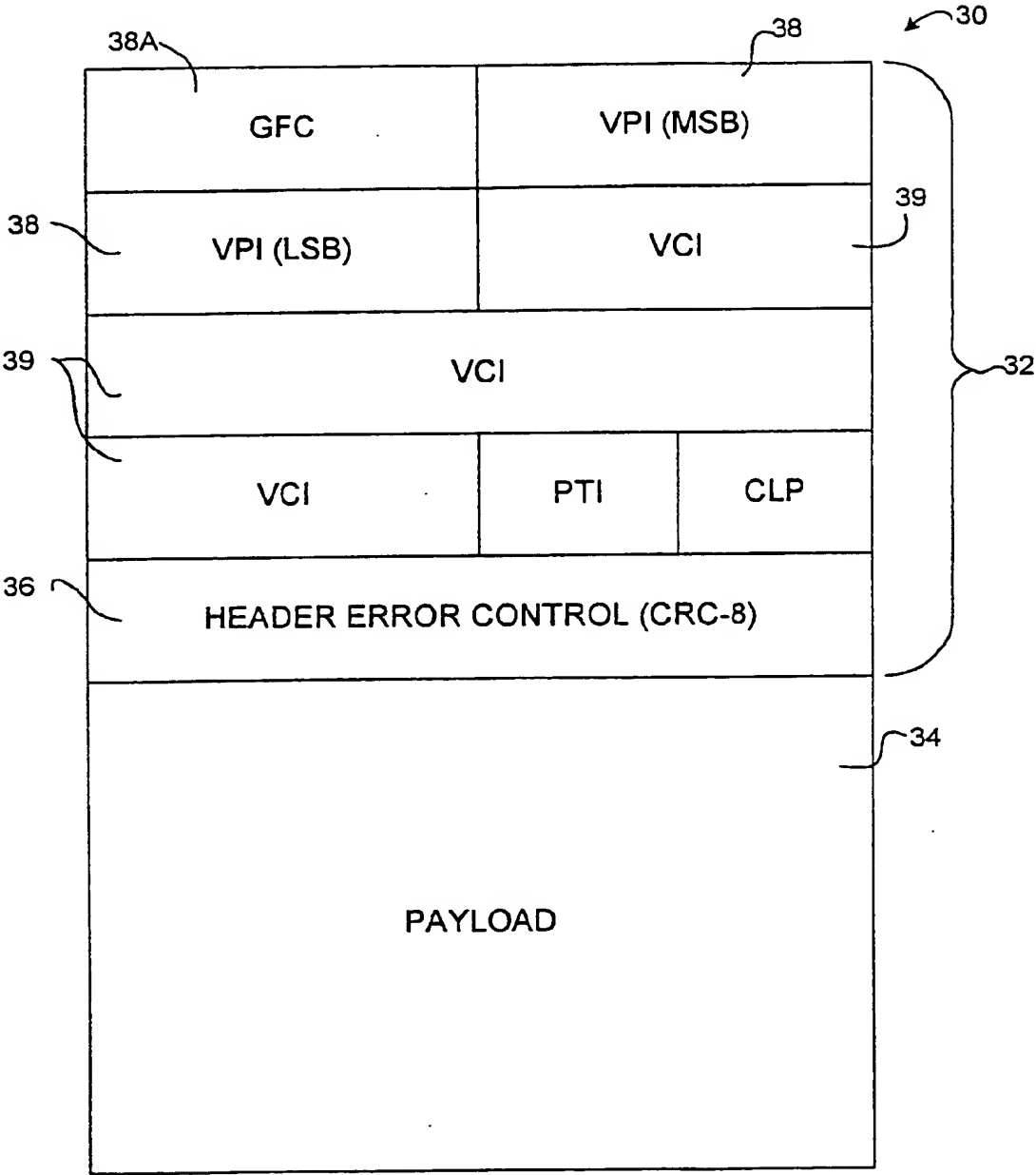


FIG. 2A
(PRIOR ART)

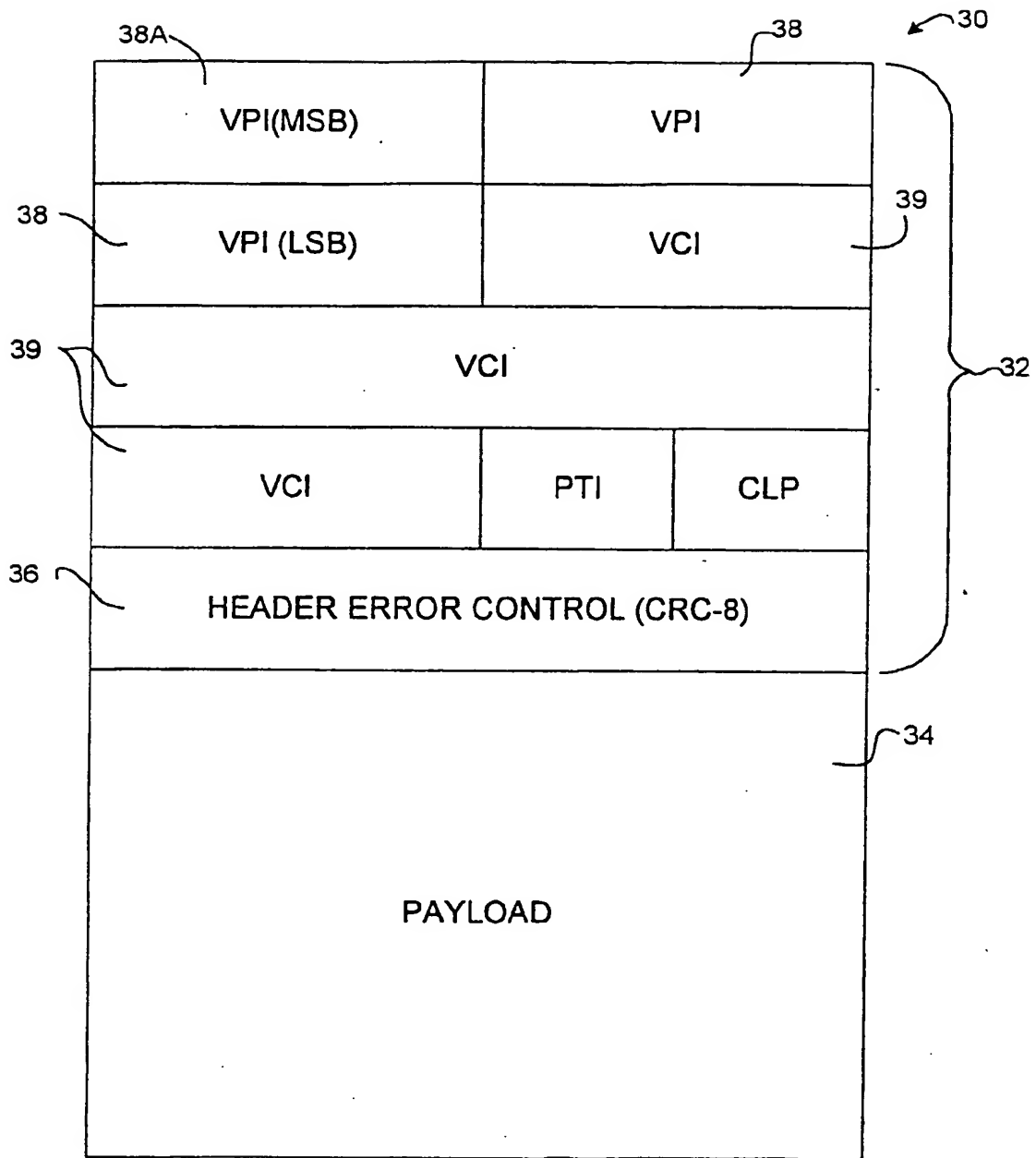


FIG. 2B
(PRIOR ART)

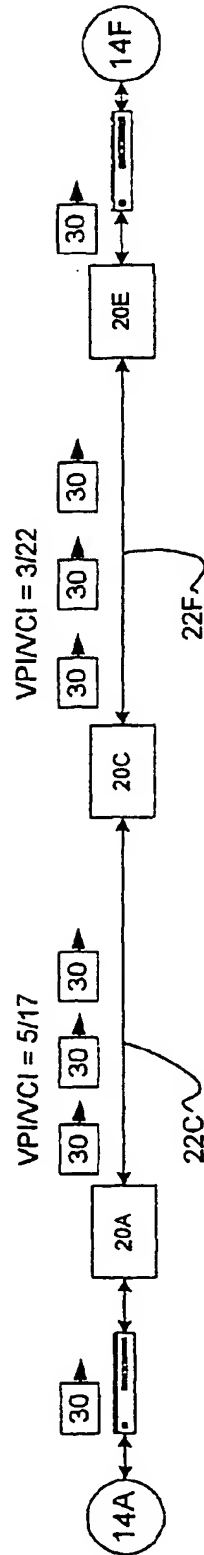


FIG. 3
(PRIOR ART)

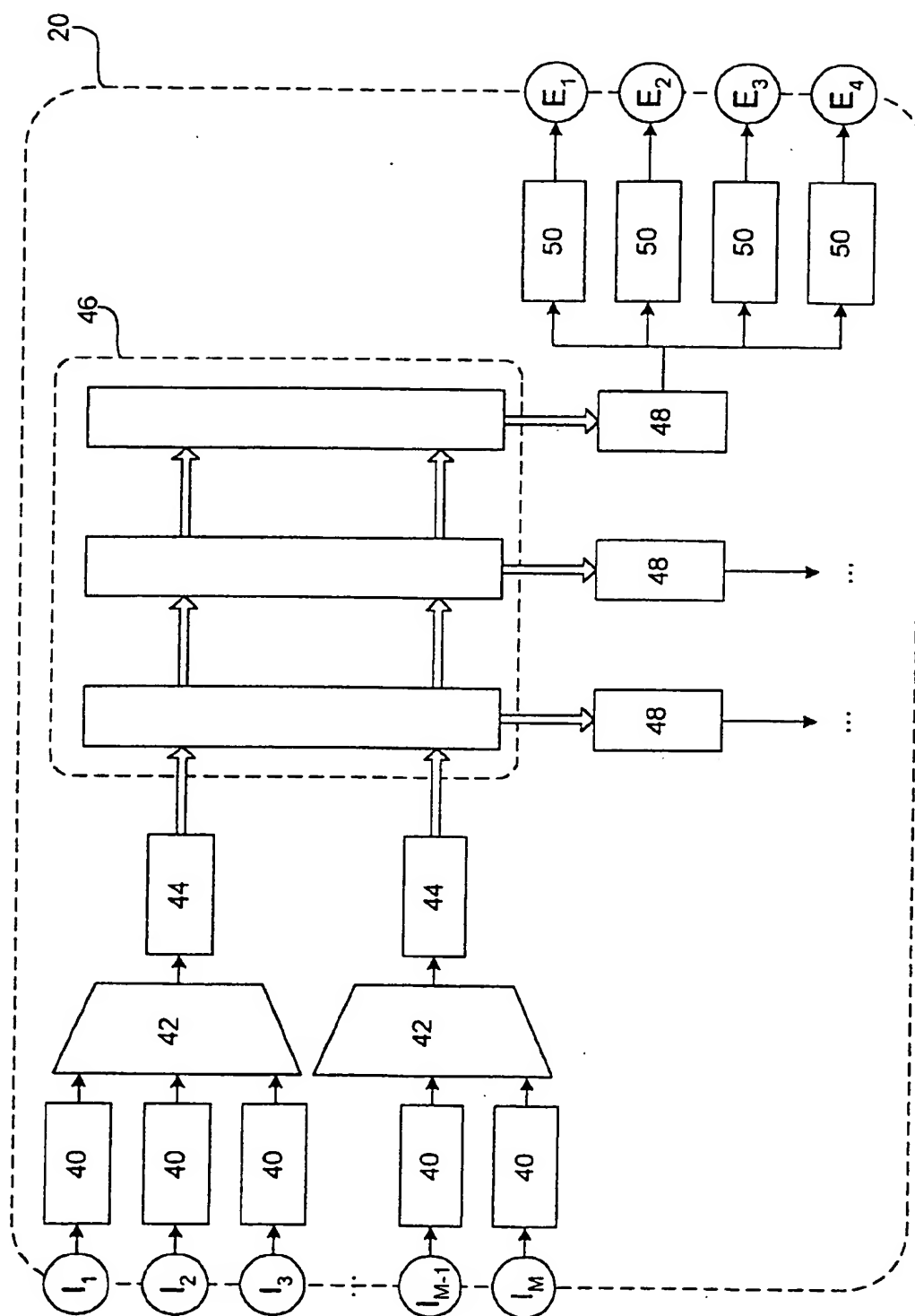


FIG. 4 (PRIOR ART)

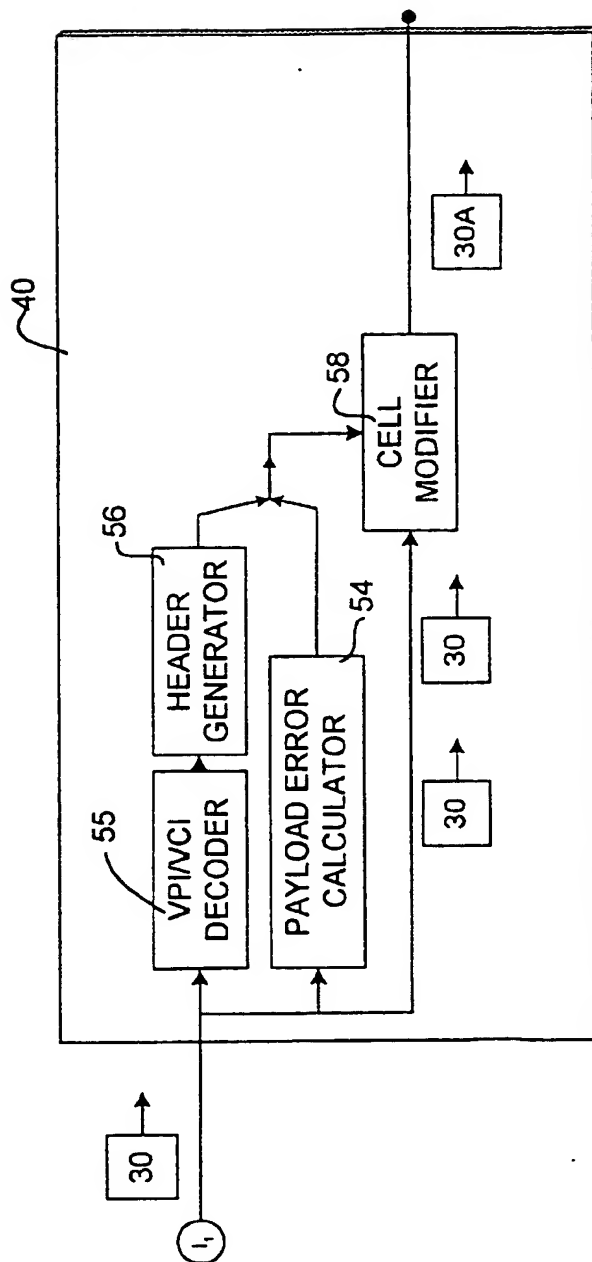


FIG. 5

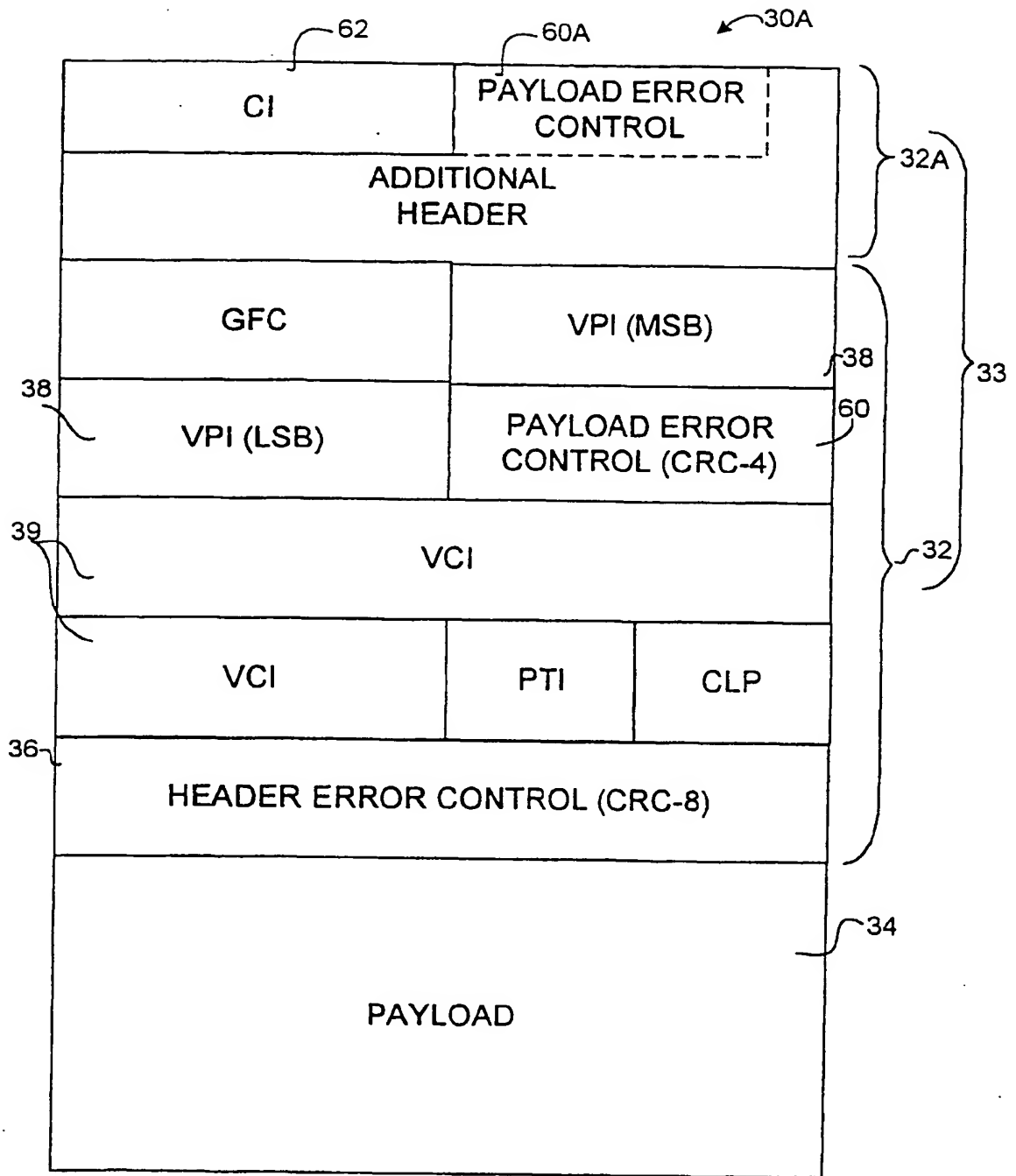


FIG. 6

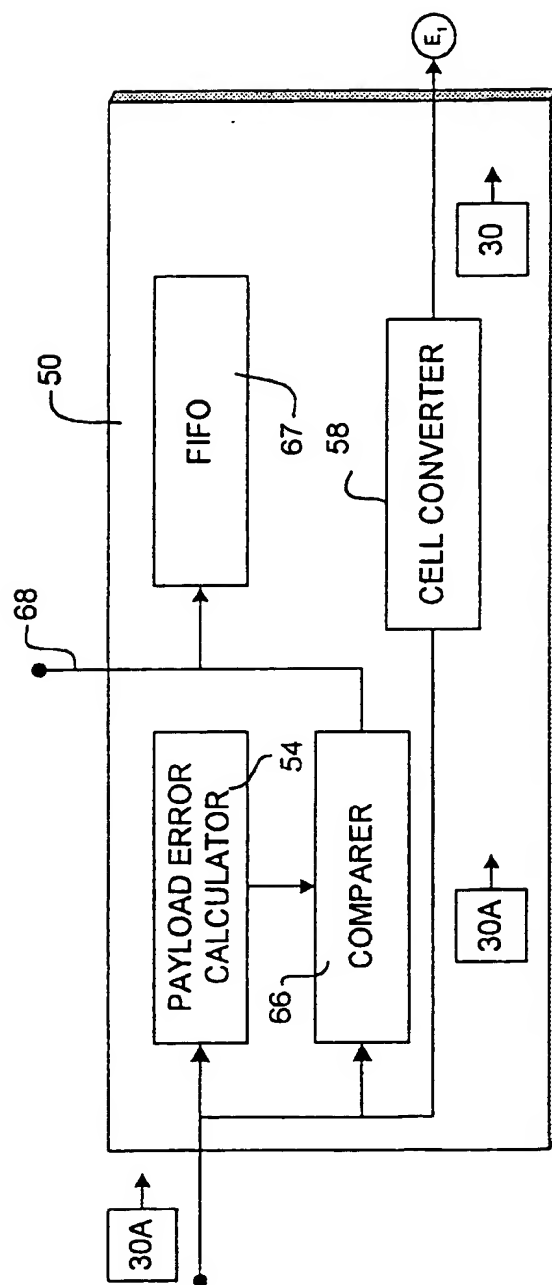


FIG. 7

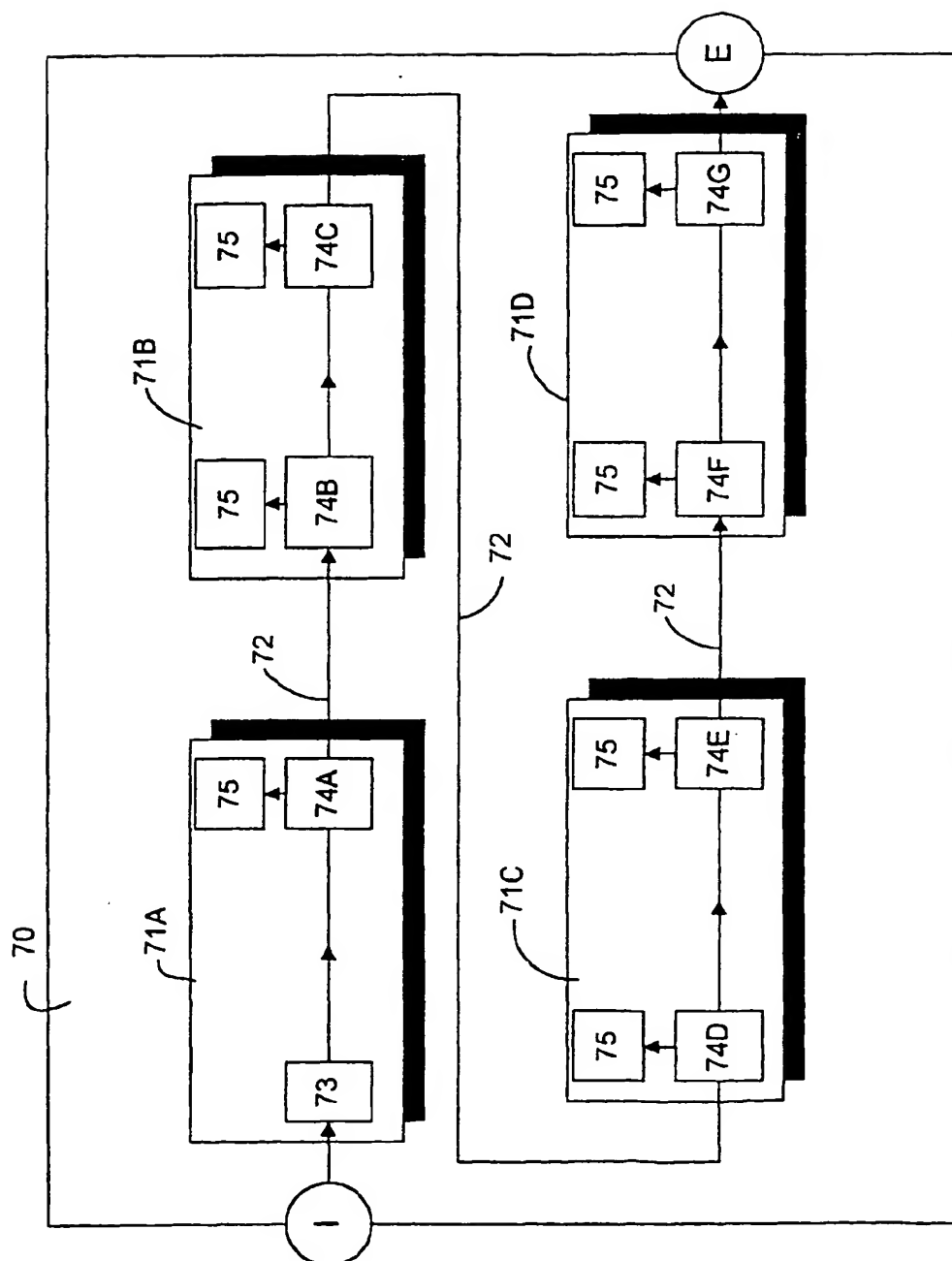


FIG. 8

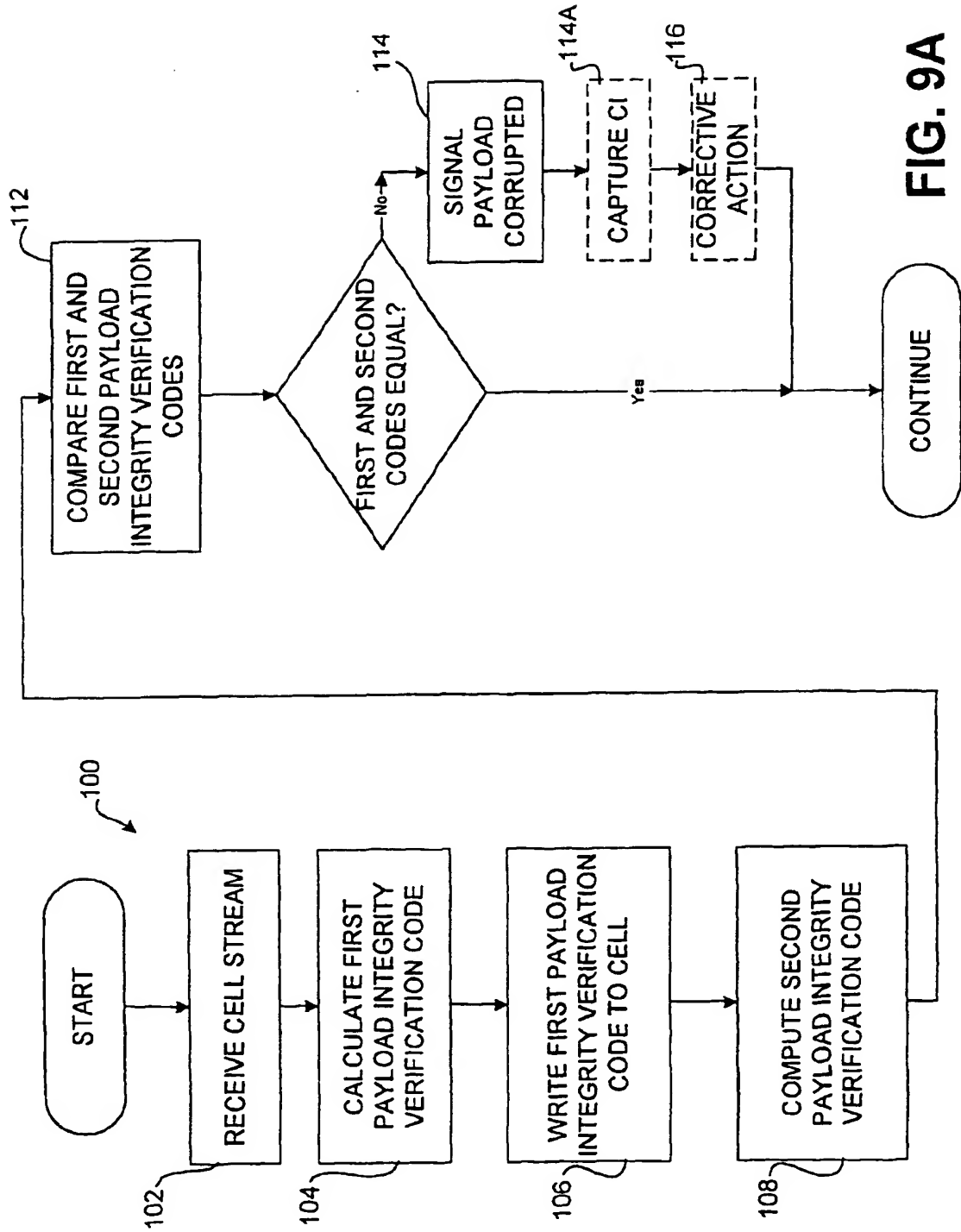


FIG. 9A

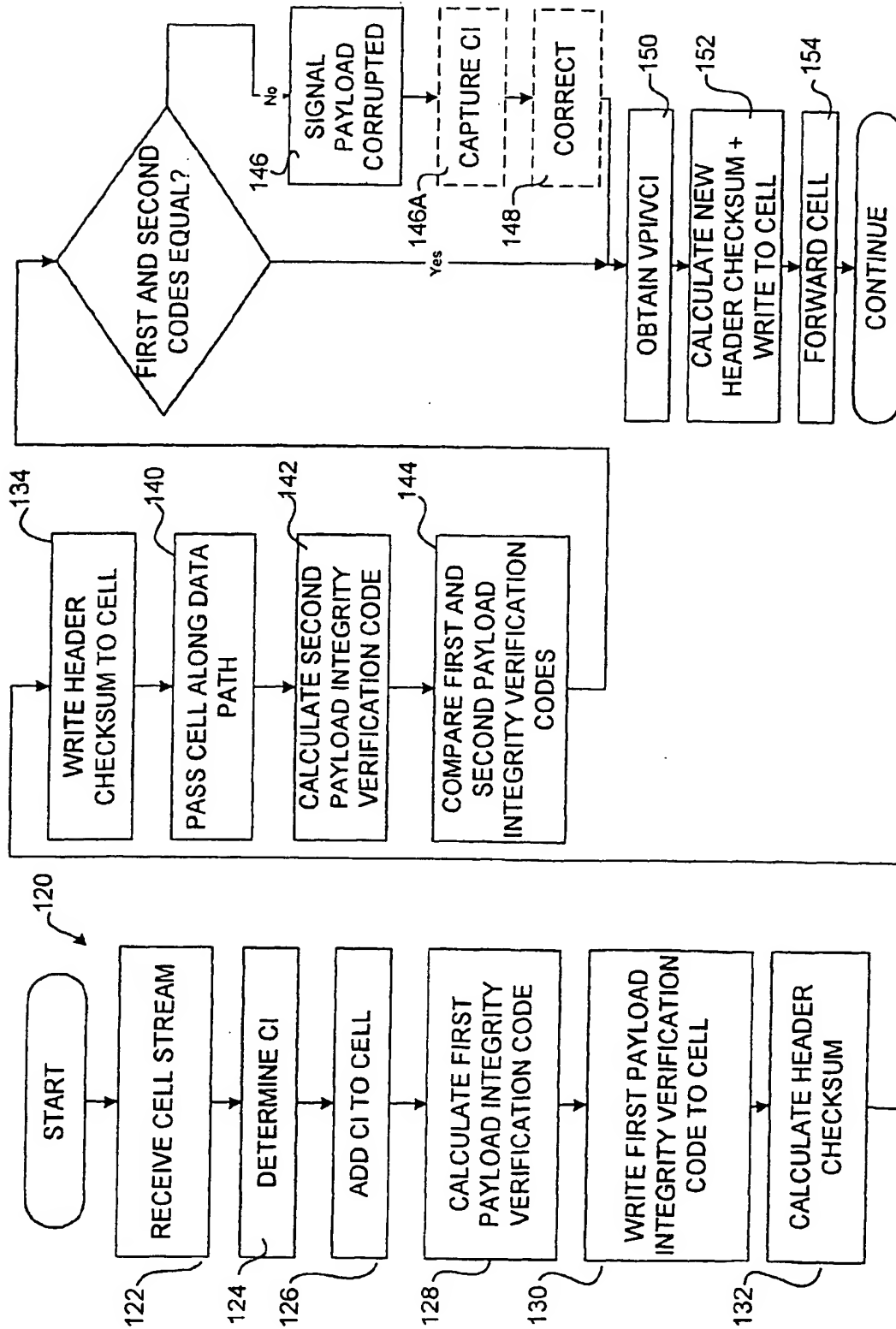


FIG. 9B

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Application No: GB 0101704.5
Claims searched: 1 to 9

Examiner: A J Oldershaw
Date of search: 25 June 2001

Patents Act 1977 Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.S): H4P PEP

Int Cl (Ed.7): H04L; H04Q

Other: Online: WPI, EPODOC, JAPIO

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
X	GB2313748 A (NORTHERN TELECOM)	1 at least
X,&	EP0909109 A1 (ALCATEL)	"
X	WO98/34380 A2 (GTE)	1-9
X,E,&	US6185715 B1 (ALCATEL)	1 at least
X	US5717689 (LUCENT)	"
X	US5648969 (NETRO)	"
X	US5606558 (ALCATEL)	"
X	JP110340989 (NEC)	"
X	JP090247129 (NIPPONDENSO)	"
X	JP070245600 (NIPPON T & T)	"

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.

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